



The official newspaper  
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Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River  
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# The Big Bend Paisano

Natt Dodge

View from the south rim of the Chisos, April 1945

## Texas' Gift to the Nation

WELCOME TO BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK AND THE RIO GRANDE WILD & SCENIC RIVER! Big Bend is one of the largest and least visited of America's national parks. Over 800,000 acres await your exploration and enjoyment. From an elevation of less than 2,000 feet along the Rio Grande to nearly 8,000 feet in the Chisos Mountains, Big Bend includes massive canyons, vast desert expanses, and the entire Chisos Mountain range. Here, you can explore one of the last remaining wild corners of the United States, and experience unmatched sights, sounds, and solitude.



Established in 1944, Big Bend National Park was the first national park service area in the state of Texas. Following a nine year process of land acquisition during the Depression, President Roosevelt

received the deed to the Big Bend property on D-Day, June 6, 1944. One week later the transfer became official, and in July 1944 the park opened to visitors.

The new park was the culmination of efforts by many people throughout the state of Texas. Texans had helped to promote the park idea, raise funds to purchase privately owned lands, and in the CCC camp in the future park, young Texans built roads and facilities. The donation of the lands to create the park, and the many efforts made to ensure that Big Bend National Park came into being, led the park to be known as "Texas' Gift to the Nation."

In this issue of the Big Bend Paisano, we explore the past, present and future of Big Bend National Park.

## Visiting Big Bend - Then and Now

When Big Bend opened to visitors at the beginning of July 1944, available facilities for the potential visitor were primitive in the extreme. In fact, the first park brochure advised that, "those who wish to visit the park... should be prepared to camp, bringing their own food, bedding, and tents." While over 100 miles of roads allowed access to various points in the park, none of it would be paved until the 1950s. One writer even cautioned that "with meager accommodations... as well as there being the necessity to bring in one's rations, the prospective visitor to Big Bend will wisely bide his time."

In the past sixty years Big Bend has balanced developments for visitors with protecting park resources. While a visit to the park today includes amenities such as electricity and paved roads, in many ways, Big Bend is still as remote and magnificent a place today as it was in the 1940s.



Entrance Sign at Persimmon Gap, late 1940s.

	1944	2004
<b>Park Superintendent</b>	Ross Maxwell served as first Superintendent from 1944-1952.	John H. King is the 14th Superintendent of Big Bend.
<b>Acres</b>	697,684 acres with 15,236 acres still to be purchased.	801,163 acres.
<b>Number of Employees</b>	5: Superintendent, Chief Ranger, Clerk, Foreman, & a Laborer.	92 permanent and 45 seasonal employees in five divisions.
<b>Annual Budget</b>	\$15,000	\$4,995,000.00 (Fiscal Year 2004)
<b>Interpretive Programs</b>	Regularly scheduled interpretive programs would not begin until 1947.	In 2003, park rangers presented 662 programs to 12,775 visitors.
<b>Lodge Facilities</b>	Four cottages built by the CCC; additional facilities would be built in 1946.	The Chisos Mountains Lodge has a total of 72 rooms, including the CCC Cottages.
<b>Number of Visitors</b>	1,409	314,747 visitors in 2003
<b>Park Headquarters</b>	Park headquarters and staff housing were located in the former CCC camp in the Chisos Basin.	Park headquarters and staff housing is located at Panther Junction.
<b>Livestock</b>	Approximately 38,000 head of cattle, goats, sheep, and horses remained in the park through 1945.	Approximately 100 head of "Trespass Livestock" - burros, mules, and horses from across the border that reside in the park.

## What's Inside

Welcome.....	2
Bookstore.....	3
Park News.....	4
Creating Big Bend.....	5
Preserving Big Bend.....	6
Keep Wildlife Wild.....	7
What To Do?.....	8
Hiking Trails.....	9
"Birth of a National Park".....	10
Early Views of the Park.....	11
General Information.....	12
Backcountry Planning.....	13
Park Map/Phone #s.....	14
Safety Tips.....	15

### IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Park Rangers are available to provide assistance. Dial 911 or (432) 477-2251

Phones are located at:  
visitor centers,  
campgrounds,  
Camper Stores, and the  
Chisos Mountains Lodge.

**911**